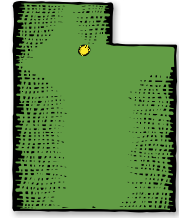




# Success Story



## Spring Creek Elementary Combines the *A+nyWhere Learning System*® and *A+ LearningLink*™ in Its RTI Tier 3 Program

In education, “Tier 3” represents a call to action. The phrase “intensive intervention” is often used. Ryan McCarty’s special education students at Spring Creek Elementary (Provo, Utah) are Tier 3 students that are already behind one or more grade levels in math or reading when McCarty first meets them.

My ultimate goal is to catch them up. But most immediately, I have to narrow the gap. I have to reverse the trend. Many of these kids have seen the gap widening for some time.

— RYAN MCCARTY, SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

Over the course of a day, Special Education Teacher McCarty instructs about 30 Tier 3 students in the first to sixth grades. “My ultimate goal is to catch them up,” says McCarty. “But most immediately, I have to narrow the gap. I have to reverse the trend. Many of these kids have seen the gap widening for some time. They see themselves as behind now—and farther behind two years from now.”

### Tier 3 Prerequisites

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a widely adopted strategy for evaluating students according to the level of teaching intervention necessary for them to achieve expected grade-level performance in reading and math.

### At a Glance

**School Locations:** Spring Creek, UT

**Challenge:** Ut am vulput nulputat. Odit landipit nulputat, consed tem iusci tionulputat lum zzriusci dolendre.

**Solution:** Faccummolore feum acin ulput dolor incil ulputpat ver am zzriustrud moloborem dolestie min hent nonsed et nismodignim zzrit ulla feu feugiam quat aliscidunt praestionum dit dolore tem alis nullut.

**Result:** Ipsusci tat, quismol estisl dolore essim dolenisi bla facil do odit aliquat loreet ea augait prat. Molestrud te eugiamc onsequam accumsan et eu feu.

For Tier 1 students, a regular schedule of instruction by a qualified teacher using evidence based methods is effective. At any given time in a typical school, about 85 percent of students can be found in Tier 1. In addition to the regular program, Tier 2 students receive targeted, remedial instruction, usually several classes per week, for limited periods of time—weeks or months. About 10 percent of students are in Tier 2. Tier 3 students, typically about five percent of the student population, are those who have been found to need highly focused, individualized instruction on a daily basis.

Successful Tier 3 instruction demands specificity. “First of all,” says McCarty, “I have to identify the ‘holes’ in each student’s understanding and skill set. My resolution has to be finer than an entire grade level. To simply re-teach entire grade levels would be too slow and diffuse. It wouldn’t narrow the gap.”

Faced with an educational problem, a teacher can usually refer to a substantial body of validated research on successful methods. This is not the case for Tier 3 instruction. As the Institute of Education Sciences points out in its 2009 guide, “Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention and Multi Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades” (U.S. Department of Education document NCEE 2009 4045), “...we are candid about the paucity of research on effective Tier 3 intervention. Tier 3 intervention is the most ambiguous component of RTI, and we did not find research on valid programs or processes.”

Even so, the Tier 3 teacher does not proceed blindly, but must be flexible, adaptive, and find validation in repeated cycles of instruction and testing undertaken in the midst of the teaching process. Additionally, because they must shift gears as opportunities arise and initially promising methods fail, careful and robust instructional planning that can absorb changes and still preserve strategic cohesion and scaffolding becomes especially important in Tier 3.

“Luckily, I have good resources,” says McCarty. “Good teacher’s aides, a generous allotment of computer workstations, and a good set of software tools.”

### Tier 3 Tools

According to McCarty, Spring Creek Elementary acquired The American Education Corporation’s *A+nyWhere Learning System*® (*A+LS*®)—a comprehensive learning management system—and *A+ LearningLink*™, a formative assessment tool in reading and math that gives performance measures as standardized Lexile® and Quantile® scores, which enables valid comparisons between different student populations and the same population at different points in time.

These tools have had a significant impact at the district and classroom level.

“At the district level, *A+ LearningLink* applies mainly to long term testing, and we use *A+LS* in a variety of ways in the other tiers,” says McCarty. “But my personal interest in *A+* is the way that I can fold both *A+LS* and *A+ LearningLink* into my direct instruction in Tier 3. I see my students moving ahead fastest when I combine one on one instruction, small group work, *A+LS* as the fundamental curriculum, and *A+ LearningLink* for finely tuned feedback on the progress of individual students.”

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McCarty begins with “ability grouping,” organizing his students into small groups who share skill levels. This establishes the groups of students who will work together. It also begins the process of revealing the particular areas of weakness that are holding each student back. “With the *A+LS* course assessments, I can quickly and precisely determine grade level ‘independence’ for each student: what the student already knows. I can find out what I don’t have to do and start to understand what I have to work on.”

As students step through their *A+LS* lessons, McCarty spends one-on-one time with each student to get a better feel for individual strengths and weaknesses. At this point, he also gets a deeper appreciation for how the students can work together within their groups.

“Students naturally progress at different speeds,” says McCarty, “and I let each student move through the lessons paced by individual ability and my direct instruction.”



But some skills—practice at math problem solving, for example—are best learned in small groups, McCarty asserts. When most of the students in a group are working on the same lessons, McCarty can smoothly shift to small group instruction by sending *A+LS* practice problems to his Promethean interactive whiteboard. Each *A+LS* lesson has about 30 practice problems that require the students to apply concepts in depth. These problems do a very good job of exploring the same concepts from different perspectives. McCarty models the first few problems on the whiteboard and then gradually lets the students take over, solving the problems themselves. He has found the technique to be very effective.

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After completing their *A+LS* lessons and initial direct instruction, McCarty's students move to an *A+ LearningLink* assessment. "Each of the *A+ LearningLink* components gives a targeted, probing standardized assessment in some area of math or reading," says McCarty. "It's a formative assessment that I use as a discovery tool for highlighting less obvious weaknesses in individual students. It also has a nice feature that tracks back to my direct instruction.

For instance, McCarty can set up *A+ LearningLink* so that, in addition to the assessment results, it returns prescriptions—assignments in *A+LS* that directly address the weak areas that were uncovered in *A+ LearningLink*. He can then revisit a student's problem areas with greater specificity.

In this way, McCarty employs an iterative cycle of target, teach, test, and adjust that is well-suited to Tier 3 students. It is thorough and includes a variety of teaching methods to avoid tedium. "By combining *A+LS* and *A+*

*LearningLink*, essentially all my teaching efforts remain focused on high-priority goals," says McCarty. "Even when I'm teaching multiple groups at different performance levels, my students aren't spending time on 'busy work.'"

### Networked Synergy

An important component of the RTI strategy is that Tier 3 students also attend regular classes at his or her expected grade level to retain ongoing social relationships with other classmates. This ongoing connection to Tier 1 also helps Tier 3 students learn skills that develop naturally in heterogeneous groups, such as vocabulary building. Within an RTI framework, then, considerable advantage would accrue to the student if Tier 3 instruction and regular education instruction could somehow reinforce each other.

In the traditional classroom, actually achieving such a high level of coordination would have been extremely difficult. Networked computer systems, however, are ideal for carrying out complex, managed communications. "For me," says McCarty, "one very useful characteristic of our *A+* system is that it spans the whole school. All our 500 students have access to it. That establishes a sense of continuity, especially as students move between programs.

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More importantly, according to McCarty, he can modify his *A+LS* lessons so that they sync up directly with other software tools that his students are using in regular education classes, and even with specific lessons that



his students are being taught. “That creates a welcome synergy between special ed and regular ed that isn’t always easy to come by,” McCarty adds.

Of course, outcomes are the final arbiter of success in Tier 3, as they are throughout education. “Our A+ system has been operational for about a year,” says McCarty. “My classroom experience is encouraging. At the start of this school year, I had two groups of students, including fourth and fifth graders, who could not pass at the second-grade level. Using one-on-one, small groups, A+LS, and A+ LearningLink in a complementary way, I got both groups performing well at the second-grade level by December. Right now, both groups are working on third-grade material. There is a good chance that they will be at expected grade level soon. That’s what I mean by closing the gap.”

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## About The American Education Corporation (AEC)

Early recognition of the national trend in school accountability, combined with an understanding of the impact of the Internet on education, has allowed AEC to become an industry leader in e-learning solutions. Few education companies offer the systemized combination of formative assessment, proven instruction, alignment to standards, and data management and reporting capabilities of AEC’s comprehensive courseware and learning management system.

The *A+nyWhere Learning System*® (A+LS™) software program is an e-learning solution ideal for schools searching for more efficient ways to improve their instructional processes. The A+LS courseware program consists of an award-winning instructional management system supported by significant core curriculum content for grades K–12 and adult learners delivered through a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), or the Internet. The research-based curriculum content is in the subject areas of Reading, Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Writing, and Social Sciences. This curriculum is linked to state standards and combined with valuable formative assessment tests designed to guide instruction throughout the school year — as well as give school administrators the data they need to ensure maximum student performance.

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Spring Creek Elementary, Utah